

**Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan or local Sarawak Chinese literature: a perspective
from regional experience towards rainforest writing**

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Abstract: The concept of 'Sinophone literature' reminds us that in this new century, the ideology of literary history is no longer stringent, as a result, the geographical view of literature should be changed accordingly as well. When we agree that Sarawak Chinese literature does not belong to Mahua literature, can we then classify all Sarawak Chinese literature into one category? This is the main argument of the paper. This paper consists of three parts. The first part discusses what does the strengthening of indigenous Sarawak Chinese literature mean based on the characteristics of the island of Borneo. The second part divides Sarawakian Chinese authors in two groups, namely 'Taiwan-based authors' and 'local authors' and further examines how regional experience affects their works. It is, however, difficult to distinguish which part is affected by Taiwan's influence and which part is their self-creation, especially in this era of globalisation. In spite of that, we can narrow the scope of study down to the works of rainforest writing of Sarawakian Chinese writers to gain more refined study. Therefore, the fictional works of Li Yongping (李永平) and Chang Kuei-hsin (張貴興) who have been resided in Taiwan for many years will be taken as examples and compared with the works of local authors on rainforest writing, the differences and individual complexity between both will then be questioned and deliberated. Finally, the dialogues or contrasts between Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan and local Sarawak Chinese literature will be analysed based on the criticism and self-criticism in 'Sinophone literature'.

Keywords: Sarawak Chinese literature, Taiwan-based experience, local experience, rainforest writing, Sinophone literature

1. Preface

Among the Mahua literature, Sarawak literature or to be called as Sarawak Chinese literature can be described as a geospatial location, but at the same time it can also be a platform for literary imagination, provides writers (especially Sarawakian Chinese writers) and critics endless discussion and debate. When some Sarawakian Chinese writers do not see themselves as Mahua writers but emphasise on the identity of “Sarawakian Chinese”, for instance Lee Yongping who resides in Taiwan once said: “I have never been close to Malaysia, never write something about Peninsular Malaysia, only the island of Borneo.”¹ “I’m angry, I have told the Taiwanese literary field again and again, that I have no comment on “Mahua literature” but Lee Yongping is not a Mahua author, Malaysia for me is only a strange concept that has no relationship.”² Local author Tian Si (田思) once said: “Due to some aspects of history, we think the term ‘Sarawak Chinese’ can show the special situation in Sarawak in terms of history, geography and humanity, they are different from West Malaysia.”³ Thus, how do we define ‘Sarawak Chinese literature’? Or what is ‘Sarawak Chinese literature’?

Sarawak Chinese literature was first found in the 1950s, and developed from 1956 to 1962. It was the historical moment of changing perspective from overseas Chinese consciousness to local Sarawak Chinese consciousness. In 1954, after the alteration of Chinese nationality policy, Sarawakian Chinese started to consider issues regarding nationality and identity, the most favourable literary production was the poem “Zuguo”(nation, 祖國) written by Wu An(吳岸) in 1957, describing a Sarawak-born Chinese young man bidding his mother who is going to return to China adieu: “Your homeland was once my heaven, you want me to remember again and again, under the soil were our ancestors, I always remember—but mother, so long! My homeland is calling me, she is under my feet, not on the other side, but this breezy, rainy, sunny land! This stormy island!”⁴ The young man in the poem chose to stay, because his homeland is no longer China but the land under his feet- Sarawak, a final goodbye to the so-called ‘China Identity’.

The foundation of Sarawak Chinese literature was in fact earlier than the formation of the country of Malaya; Sarawak has only joined to be a part of Malaysia in 1963. Hence, local Chinese acknowledged Sarawak first and then Malaysia. Similarly, it was first the Sarawak literature and then it becomes a part of Mahua literature. If the political aspect is taken out, Sarawak Chinese literature should be an independent body; it has its own uniqueness.

¹Sorted by Yanling Wu, Huimin Shi: “Rensheng Lanyou Zhaodaole Mudidi-Interview with Li Yonping(1)”, Kuala Lumpur: Sin Chew Daily, Wen Yi Chunqiu, 15 March 2009. (人生浪遊找到了目的地——李永平訪談錄(上))

²Sorted by Yanling Wu, Huimin Shi: “Rensheng Lanyou Zhaodaole Mudidi-Interview with Li Yonping(1)”, Kuala Lumpur: Sin Chew Daily, Wen Yi Chunqiu, 15 March 2009. (人生浪遊找到了目的地——李永平訪談錄(上))

³Yu-Bing Huang: “Shuxiw Poluozhou vs Shahua Wenxue- Radio Interview with Tian Si”, Kuala Lumpur, Sin Chew Daily, Wen Yi Chunqiu, 29 June 2008. (書寫婆羅洲 Vs 砂華文學——田思電台訪談摘錄)

⁴Wu An: “Zuguo, Mao Shang de Shipian”, Hong Kong: Xinyue, 1962, page 44.

This issue can be traced back to 'Sinophone literature'. The concept 'Sinophone literature' was introduced by American scholar Shu-mei Shih (史書美), she pointed out that there are differences between separate Chinese diaspora groups and the native Chinese in terms of experience and attitude. Shu-mei Shih proposed the idea of 'anti-diasporic' and criticised that analysis of Chinese diaspora encouraged singleness in the aspects of ethnicity, culture, language and place of origin.⁵ This general identity of nation and race is said to be a false recognition of ethnicity, culture and language and it represents the influence of power of China Han people on the minority and Chinese diaspora in the history of China. Furthermore, Professor Shih emphasised that in contrast to the political power of Republic China as 'China', overseas Chinese have the right to decide that they are not 'China' Chinese in their literary works. Since they do not think they are 'China' Chinese from this limited perspective, they must defend their point of view, which is the concept of 'Sinophone'.⁶ This reminds us that Sarawak belongs to Malaysia politically, but there is still the South China Sea across East and West Malaysia; the customs and beliefs between East and West Malaysia are also significantly different, there is even difference in political view. Thus, when Sarawak Chinese literature has developed their 'local uniqueness', they then can decline to be labelled under Mahua literature automatically.

One interesting point is, when Sarawak Chinese literature begins to develop, Sarawakian Chinese writers did not approach Mahua literature, on the other hand, they encouraged to 'write the island of Borneo'. This more or less shows the specification and geographical characteristic of Sarawak Chinese literature. In December 2002, Sarawakian Chinese writer Tian Si first introduced the idea of 'writing the island of Borneo' during a talk organised by Sibu Zhong Hua Literature Association. The island of Borneo is the third largest island in the world; this island consists of East Malaysia- Sarawak and Sabah and Brunei as well as Kalimantan, Indonesia. Tian Si believed that writing the island of Borneo is a type of writing strategic, through the multiracial, multicultural, multi-ecosystem and multi-attraction in the island of Borneo, the dimension and content of Sarawak Chinese literature can be enlarged and the value of Sarawak Chinese literature as local literature can be increased.⁷ The term 'locality' is rather tricky. From this point of view, the 'locality' of Sarawak Chinese literature cannot be seen in Mahua literature, its 'locality' or so-called 'uniqueness' is very much related to the island of Borneo. Ever since Tian Si proposed this 'writing the island of Borneo', there is enormous support from other Sarawakian Chinese authors such as Si Wen Ting, Shen Qin Wang, Lan Po, etc: Mentor Publishing in Kuala Lumpur even published 'a series of the island of Borneo' books in conjunction with this slogan, for example "Lie Diao Poluozhou" by Yang Yi Xiong (楊藝雄, 獵釣婆羅洲), "Tuobian de Shanlin" by Shen Qin Wang(沈慶旺, 蛻變的山林), "Xunzhao Bu Da Fu"(尋找不達夫)and "Sarawak Yulin Shipu" (砂拉越雨林食譜)by Lan Po(藍波).

⁵Shu-mei Shih: *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. Page 26-27.

⁶ Shu-mei Shih: *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*. New York: Colimbia University Press, 2012. Page 26-27.

⁷Yu-Bing Huang:"Shuxiw Poluozhou vs Shahua Wenxue- Radio Interview with Tian Si", Kuala Lumpur, Sinchew Daily, Wenyi Chunqiu, 29 June 2008. (書寫婆羅洲 Vs 砂華文學——田思電台訪談摘錄)

To protest is to get rid of singleness and monarchy. Nevertheless, Sarawak Chinese literature and Mahua literature do not have the characteristics of 'diasporic' and 'colonial' that exist between overseas Chinese literature and Chinese literature which was expressed by Shu-mei Shih. David Der-Wei Wang (王德威) has a concern that the distinction between 'overseas' and 'China' of proposed by Professor Shih is inflexible.⁸ Hence, the argument of this paper is almost identical to what David Der-Wei Wang has mentioned, as the works of Su Tong (蘇童) consist Suzhou's characteristics; Shanghai's features for Wang An Yi (王安憶), even when they use the same Mandarin, there are, in fact, geographical characteristics and personal styles, they cannot all be categorised into 'Chinese discursive hegemony and colonial discourse'.⁹ In other words, it is not a contrast perspective when it rejected to be labelled, but an attitude to identify individual geographical characteristics and uniqueness. Therefore, Lai He (賴和) from Taiwan is known as the Lu Xun (魯迅) in Taiwan, Li Tian Bao (李天葆) from Malaysian is known as Eileen Chang (張愛玲) in Nanyang. By geographical characteristics and the writing style of the authors, the influence of geographical location or aesthetic style can be seen clearly.

The concept of 'Sinophone literature' reminds us that in this new century, the ideology of literary history is no longer stringent, as a result, the geographical view of literature should be changed accordingly as well. When we agree that Sarawak Chinese literature does not belong to Mahua literature, can we then classify all Sarawak Chinese literature into one category? This is the main argument of the paper. This paper consists of three parts. The first part discusses what does the strengthening of indigenous Sarawak Chinese literature mean based on the characteristics of the island of Borneo. The second part divides Sarawakian Chinese authors in two groups, namely 'Taiwan-based authors' and 'local authors' and further examines how regional experience affects their works. It is, however, difficult to distinguish which part is affected by Taiwanese influence and which part is their self-creation, especially in this era of globalisation. In spite of that, we can narrow the scope of study down to the works of rainforest writing of Sarawakian Chinese writers to gain more refined study. Therefore, the fictional works of Li Yongping (李永平) and Chang Kuei-hsin (張貴興) who have been resided in Taiwan for many years will be taken as examples and compared with the works of local authors on rainforest writing, the differences and individual complexity between both will then be questioned and deliberated. Finally, the dialogues or contrasts between Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan and local Sarawak Chinese literature will be analysed based on the criticism and self-criticism in 'Sinophone literature'.

⁸David Der-wei Wang: "Wenxue Dili yu Guozu Xiangxiang: Taiwan de Luxun, Nanyang de Zhangailing, Zhongguo Xiandai WenXue, volume 22, December 2012, page 25. (文學地理與國族想像：台灣的魯迅，南洋的張愛玲，《中國現代文學》)

⁹David Der-wei Wang: "Wenxue Dili yu Guozu Xiangxiang: Taiwan de Luxun, Nanyang de Zhangailing, Zhongguo Xiandai WenXue, volume 22, December 2012, page 26.

2. Writing the island of Borneo: the contrast between local and Taiwan-based

When Tian Si proposed the idea of 'writing the island of Borneo' and listed down the local characteristics of Sarawak Chinese literature, the first point is 'mysterious rainforest' and indicates that 'writing the island of Borneo' is also a broad generalized rainforest literature.¹⁰ He also concludes that the Sarawak Chinese literature is not only different from the Chinese literature in China, Taiwan, North America, but also utterly different from West Malaysia.¹¹ In addition, Malaysia scholar Chong Yi Wen (鐘怡雯) who had studied in Taiwan once claimed that, as the development of West Malaysia, a handful of writers moved to cities in the late 80s and rainforests have become the common imagination of authors and readers in West Malaysia, but the authors in East Malaysia especially in Sarawak write about rainforests.¹² The mystery of rainforest on the island of Borneo will be the starting point of this paper and then the local Sarawak Chinese literary works and the works by Taiwan-based authors will be compared.

The literary works of local Sarawakian Chinese writers are mostly poetry and prose, based on reality and the content focused on regional characteristics. The main geographical characteristics of Sarawak Chinese literature is no doubt the 'rainforest'. Sarawak is located in the northwest of the world's third largest island, Borneo; there are plenty of rainfalls, lofty mountains and streams; the population is only about two million, Sarawak is still full of mystery and the rainforests give people borderless imagination. The literary works that based on 'rainforest' include "Tuobian de Shanlin" by Shen Qing Wang (2007), "Sarawak Yulin Shipu" by Lan Po (2009), "Yulin de Shengyan" by Lim An Song (林岸松, 雨林的盛宴) (2002), "Yulin Shiyu" by Tian Si (2012), etc. These works consist of prose, poetry and even recipes. In comparison to local Sarawak Chinese literature, most of the literary works by Taiwan-based Sarawakian Chinese writers are fiction. The main works include "Qun Xiang" (Herds of Elephants, 群象) (1998), "Hou Bei" (The Primate Cup, 猴杯) (2000), "Wo Sinian de ChangmianZhong de Nanguo Gongzhu" (My South Seas Sleeping Beauty, 我思念的長眠中的南國公主) (2001) by Chang Kuei-hsin (張貴興) and "Yuxue Feifei: Poluo Zhou Tongnian Jishi" (雨雪霏霏: 婆羅洲童年記事) (2002), "Dahe Jintou-Shangjuan" (大河盡頭 (上卷)) (2007), "Dahe Jintou-Xiajuan" (大河盡頭 (下卷)) (2010), "Zhu Ling Shu" (朱翎書) (2015) by Li Yongping (李永平). However, Taiwan-based writers did not limit themselves in writing only Sarawak; they also wrote the other parts of the island of Borneo, this shows the real 'writing the island of Borneo'.

The rainforest boasts an abundance of wildlife. Chong Yi Wen pointed out that the biggest problem of rainforest writing is, besides the minority of botanists and professionals, no one really

¹⁰Tian Si: "Shahuawenxue de Bentutezhi, Shahuawenxue de Bentutezhi", Selangor: Mentor Publishing Sdn Bhd, 2014, page 22. (砂華文學的本土特質, 《砂華文學的本土特質》)

¹¹Tian Si: "Shahuawenxue de Bentutezhi, Shahuawenxue de Bentutezhi", Selangor: Mentor Publishing Sdn Bhd, 2014, page 31.

¹²Chong Yi Wen: "Shahua Ziran Xiezu de Zaidishiye yu Meixuejiangou, Linghun de Jinweidu", Selangor: Mentor Publishing Sdn Bhd, 2016, page 133. (砂華自然寫作的在地視野與美學建構, 《靈魂的經緯度》)

knows what kind of unique species the rainforest can offer.¹³ Local Sarawakian Chinese writer Yang Yi Xiong's (楊藝雄) prose "Lie Bao Poluozhou" (獵釣婆羅洲) recorded his hunting and fishing stories and the legends of wild boar, bison, crocodiles, dolphins, lizards and so on. Yang Yi Xiong is a hunter and fisherman, he belongs to one of the minority that Chong Yi Wen has mentioned, who is well aware of the habits of wild animals. He writes not only his personal experience and what he has heard, but also some additional information about animals, for example 'crocodile': Crocodiles are dinosaurs' cousins: 65 million years ago, dinosaurs and most of the reptiles were extinct as they could not adapt themselves to the harsh climate change during the end of the Mesozoic; crocodiles has survived through this catastrophe, they adapt and withstand environmental change that caused by climate change...¹⁴ Chang Kuei-hsin in his novel "Qun Xiang" wrote about crocodiles too, he cited the sentences with 'crocodile' in some Chinese classical texts such as "Wu Lei Xiang Gan Zhi"(物類相感志), "Yi Wu Zhi" (異物誌), "Records of Diverse Matters" (博物志), "Shuo Wen"(說文), "Compendium of Materia Medica"(本草綱目), "The Customs of Cambodia"(真臘風土記), "Guan Tze. Shui Di Pian" (管子.水地篇) and so on to indicate that crocodile is the variant of dragon. Moreover, the novel also specifically mentioned that 'crocodile' is the 'mystification of dragon'. Evolution. Secularised crocodile.... Zhongyuan (中原) Dragon, is terrifying. Giant crocodile who eats human.¹⁵ In contrary to Yang Yi Xiong's experience, the information provided by Chang Kuei-hsin was based on texts with some mythical elements.

Apart from referring 'crocodile' to the mythical 'dragon', Chang Kuei-hsin also demonises 'rhino'. In his novel "Hou Bei", there was a rhino governor who was fed by human but still he cannot be tamed, he killed several people, just like the monster Nian (年獸), frightened people by its figure/sound. Furthermore, the reptile 'lizard' which scattered all around the world is also being demonised, they became uncontrollable army of carnivores, came all together for the corpses that rhino governor has left behind, they were not leaving no matter how hard the people tried to burn them, this makes people feel the wildness of rainforest. Conversely, in the prose "Lie Diao Poluozhou" by Yang Yi Xiong, lizard has a lovely image, greedy lizard was fooled by human and started to eat stones happily and his stomach was full with stones, it is rather humorous.

One of the iconic floras in the rainforests is 'pitcher plant'. Tian Si depicted one poem based on 'pitcher plant'.¹⁶ Pitcher plant in the poem was a victim of modernization and pollution; it carries the message of loving nature and environmental protection. In Tian Si's poem, we can see clear water when we look inside the pitfall trap, crystal clear water reflects the blue sky that reminds

¹³Chong Yi Wen: "Shahua Ziran Xiezuo de Zaidishiye yu Meixuejiangou, Linghun de Jinweidu", Selangor: Mentor Publishing Sdn Bhd, 2016, page 119.

¹⁴Yang Yi Xiong: "Liet Tiao Poluozhou", Selangor, Mentor Publishing Sdn Bhd, 2003, page 107

¹⁵ Chang Kuei-hsin: "Qun Xiang", Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co., 2006, page 30.

¹⁶ Tian Si: "Zhulongcao, Yulin Shiyu", Selangor: Mentor Publishing Sdn Bhd, 2013, page 155-156. (豬籠草,《雨林詩雨》)

people to appreciate the nature. In the novel "Hou Bei" of Chang Kuei-hsin, we can see crystal clear digestive juice when we look inside the pitfall trap and infant's corpse is floating there. Pitcher plant was portrayed as a carnivorous beast, the trap presented a 10-months pregnant woman, eating a new born infant, and it strengthens the dramatic colours of the novel.

Another distinctive feature of the island of Borneo or Sarawak Chinese literature, besides rainforest, is multi-ethnic. There are about 27 different ethnicities in Sarawak. The largest ethnic group is the Iban, consists 30% of the population; 29% of Chinese; 21% of Malay; and other minorities including Bidayuh, Melanau, Indians, Javanese and inland indigenous. The writers, no matter Taiwan-based or local, depict the relationship between the ethnic groups. In contrast to those based in Taiwan, local Sarawak Chinese literature focalises the peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups, such as the prose 'long house magician'¹⁷ written by Tian Si. The story described a Chinese magician married to a Dayak girl and lived in the longhouse and he was able to establish a good rapport with the aborigines. Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan, on the other hand, often expresses the unequal relationship between the ethnicities, such as Chang Kuei-hsin's novel. Aboriginal girls mostly admired Chinese men and they were more open-minded, as a result, Chinese man had the opportunity to take advantages easily. Some Chinese men were those in power to persecute kind aborigines, and even used their power or advantages to get aboriginal girls' body; this can be described as colonialism settler. There was such element in Li Yongping's novel as well, but it was more towards European colonialism. White men demanded aboriginal women (even girls) to dedicate their bodies by using political forces or religious (sometimes the Bible and sometimes the Koran). The most classic character was the so-called 'magician of long house' Baba Ao Si (峇爸澳西) in Li Yongping's novels "Dahe Jintou" and "Zhu Ling Shu", he used his title and power as the counsel to the Queen and the legal adviser to Indonesian government to travel all aboriginal longhouses, won children's heart with sweets and also gave dolls to underage girls by magic tricks, and eventually took their virginities. That is the reason why Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan is discussed and viewed as Nanyang version of "Heart of Darkness"(黑暗之心) by commentators.

When Sarawak Chinese literature no longer labelled as Mahua literature and when the geographical location shifted to the island of Borneo, the regional characteristics or the so-called 'locality' of Sarawak Chinese Literature becomes clearly visible. Thus, this paper would like to narrow the scope of research area down to the writing of geographical characteristics of the island of Borneo, in order to compare the differences between 'Taiwan-based' authors and 'local' authors and develop a new perspective.

¹⁷Tian Si: "Changwu Li de Moshushi, Tian Si Shanwen Xiaoshuo Xuan", Sibü: Sarawak Chinese Cultural Association, 1996, page 21-25(長屋裡的魔術師,《田思散文小說選》)

3. Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan: presence and absence of dialogue

Tian Si, who praised the local literary works of Sarawak Chinese literature, is dissatisfied with Chang Kuei-hsin and Li Yongping who reside in Taiwan, accusing their depicted island of Borneo is 'distorted'. He gave an example in Chang Kuei-hsin's novel "Qun Xiang", it is about a description of Rajang River, saying that such description makes readers feel pretentious, nausea, resistance, and he believes that these 'outrageous' descriptions are everywhere in "Qun Xiang" and it is unreadable. In his opinion, he thinks that the real writing of the island of Borneo has to rely on local authors; they must be the people of the island who 'devoted boundless love to this piece of land and full of hope and longing for her future'.¹⁸ He argued that art should be processed on the basis of reality.

The first point against Tian Si's remark is, "Qun Xiang" is a fictional work and fiction is not based on reality. Secondly, we can retrieve the paragraphs which Tian Si has underlined to determine whether the novel of Chang Kuei-hsin has 'defamed' Rajang River or constitute 'unreasonable' aspects:

Sunny. Dawn. The first ray of the rising sun in the rainforest is just as bright as a poisonous toad. Farm animals eat and defecate, eat and defecate, their digestive and urinary system are fully functional, healthy and free. The boy, De Zhong (德中) said goodbye to his tribes at the riverside, rowing on the river. Less than two kilometers, two of them took turn to squat and poo on the deck behind. Feces fall into the river, just like infants' arms. Infants' legs. Some gather on the shore, like an infant's corpse. With a paddle in hand, De Zhong steered the boat like a master, as if there was a motor installed at the stern. The boy felt a bit dizzy, he kept washing his face with river water, the more he washed, the more dizzy and filthy he felt, as if he went into the cesspool. 30 meters in front raised a cloud from the river. Buzzed. Buzzed. Buzzed. Something on the river. Fall. Rise. Rise. Fall. Both of them scrunched up their nose by one hand and rowed slowly by another hand. Cloud passed through starboard. Green head red head and black head flies thickly covered driftage that surrounded by a group of big and small fish.¹⁹

Tian Si quoted the paragraph until here. If this single paragraph is extracted to describe Rajang River, it really makes people feel extremely sick, but what if we continue to read on:

Waves by the sampan startled the flies; they became a more majestic cloud on the river, the revealing driftage was full of a dense layer of orange, yellow

¹⁸ Tian Si: "Shuxie Poluozhou, Shahuawenxue de Bentuxingzhi", Selangor: Mentor Publishing Sdn Bhd, 2014, page 36.

¹⁹ Chang Kuei-hsin: "Qun Xiang", Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co., 2006, page 71.

and pink maggots. Waves rolling, dark cloud appeared at the east, and the west. A corpse. Butt faced up, with legs and arms, rotten flesh, visible bone, maggot fuzzily made a "大" shape around. Still a broken green jersey on the corpse. Green jersey. Uniform of the Flaming army.²⁰

So we can finally understand why the more the boy washed himself the dirtier he was in the Rajang River, as well as the stinky smell and countless flies. This does not mean that the river is contaminated or it has been the norm there, it has been explained later in the story that because there was a dead body there. The dead body was in line with the plot of the novel, this is because in story there were Sarawakian communists who refused to surrender and hid in the mountains and they fight among themselves very often. Even the boy's uncle killed people to protect themselves often. That description of Rajang River is due to the need of the story, it is quite reasonable.

The biggest difference between Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan and local Sarawak Chinese literature is the aesthetic value. Tian Si quotes the discussion of 'writing in order to express emotions' and "expressing emotions in order to write" of Lie Xie's (劉勰) "The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons" (文心雕龍) in his prose. He favours 'expressing emotions in order to write' and praises that the authors belong to this category have actual thoughts and feelings in real life and have more attainments. On the contrary, those who are 'writing in order to express emotions' by carving rhetoric, showing off writing skills and this has become a kind of word-games.²¹ This more or less can be summarised as the literary view of local Sarawak Chinese literature towards Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan. The former is real-oriented and follows the idea of 'expressing emotions in order to write'. It is appropriate if the remarks mentioned above are written in a prose. However, from the point of view of Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan that consists predominantly of fictional works, we can quote Jin Shengtan's (金聖嘆) commentaries, which are "the meaning lies in the event, and does not lie in the writing" (以文運事) and "the meaning lies in the writing, and does not lie in the event" (因文運事). On one hand, local Sarawak Chinese literature is similar to "Records of the Grand Historian" (史記), the stories must involve actual facts that it limits the authors. On the other hand, Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan is regarded as "Water Margin" (水滸傳), it is defined as "I can pen everything I want creatively", in other words, one can write freely according to artistic circumstances. The latter has relatively high attainments from a purely artistic point of view.

However, the argument of this paper is not about the aesthetic style in Chang Kuei-hsin's and Li Yongping's fictional works. There are plenty of researches about it: the sexualised passions of rainforest, textual rainforest, classical-oriented texts, journalised texts by Chang Kuei-hsin

²⁰ Chang Kuei-hsin: "Qun Xiang", Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co., 2006, page 71.

²¹ Tian Si: "Wei Qing Zhao Wen yu Wei Wen Zhao Qing, Tian Si Shanwen Xiaoshuo Xuan", Sibei: Sarawak Chinese Cultural Association, 1996, page 18-20. ("為情造文" 與 "為文造情", 《田思散文小說選》)

whereas Li Yongping fancies Chinese characters, sinfulness, confession and repentance, and both are, as outlined by Taiwan-based Mahua author Ng Kim Chew (黃錦樹), the representatives of contemporary writers. Therefore, I do not want to mention them again in this paper and do not want to highlight their Taiwanese signs through their Taiwanese writings, relatively I would like to examine their Taiwanese signs based on their writings on rainforests of the island of Borneo. It is done by defining "somewhere" ("某處") from "elsewhere" ("他處") because only the "absence" can illustrate the "presence" and we can only define all possibilities of the "presence" by investigating the "absence".

Taiwanese signs are presented in Chang Kuei-hsin's and Li Yongping's novels. The influence of Taiwan first appeared in one of Chang Kuei-hsin's rainforest series of novels "Hou bei". The protagonist in the story is a Sarawakian Chinese male teacher who is charged for seduction of underage girls in Taiwan. Taiwan is where the protagonist yearning for, but he cannot stay in Taiwan; he has to go back to Sarawak by no choice. The memory in Taiwan keeps flashing in his mind when he is back in Sarawak, but this memory is not in linear form. It is presented in "Sarawak - Taiwan - Sarawak" and vice versa. In addition to the memory in Taiwan, there are also the memories of Sarawak before he went to Taiwan. These memories constitute multiple meanings such as past and present, regret and ideal, homeland and foreign country. When it comes to "My South Seas Sleeping Beauty", the influence of Taiwan becomes more apparent. The mother of the narrator is a Taiwanese, the father of the narrator studied in Taiwan before and the narrator himself also studied in Taiwan and has a Taiwanese girlfriend. However, the Taiwan in this story and the Taiwan in "Hou bei" are different, "Taiwan" has become a reality from a virtual space, from "absent" to "present".

For another Taiwan-based Sarawakian Chinese literature writer Li Yongping, the influence of Taiwan is shown from the beginning of his rainforest series of novel. In "Yuxue Feifei", the narrator is a Sarawakian Chinese young man in Taiwan, he tells a Taiwanese girl Zhu Ling about his rainforest story. In his memories, there are three Taiwanese women, who were the victims of World War II, living in Sarawak, their whoremongers ranging from Japanese Imperial soldiers to Malay upstarts. Li's second novel in this rainforest series, "Dahe Jintou" also follows this style of narration. It is still a Sarawakian Chinese author in Taipei telling the Taiwanese girl Zhu Ling about his teenage years in the rainforest on the island of Borneo. In the recent book of Li, the Taiwanese girl Zhu Ling is depicted as the narrator, she travels through geographic space to the island of Borneo and starts her journey of adventure. However, this is not living but wandering, she has to ultimately return to Taiwan. "Taiwan", as a real "presence", is never absent in Li Yongping's novels, in contrast to the island of Borneo in his novels, which represents the "absence". The meaning and gestures of Taiwan and the island of Borneo, for Taiwan-based Sarawakian Chinese authors, are like a mirror, like a reversed image. They reflect each other and Taiwan is the entity whereas Borneo is eventually a shadow.

4. 'Local' regional experience, 'Taiwan-based' homeland imagination

We must question, if for Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan, rainforest on the island of Borneo is just a delusion, then how Chang Kuei-hsin and Li Yong Ping construct their fictional backdrop? Besides this, if it is fictional, what does the rainforest on the island of Borneo mean for them?

Chang Kuei-hsin and Li Yongping, each of them has three novels for their mythical rainforest. The novels outline rainforest but there are some changes of rainforest among these novels. The setting of Chang Kuei-hsin's rainforest novels, from "Qun Xiang" to "My South Seas Sleeping Beauty", is no longer the real rainforest. The rainforest in the novel is actually the protagonist's home, the so-called rainforest is the artificial garden of his Taiwanese's mother. The mother has planted not only some wild plant trees, but also some bizarre flowers and plants around the house. The artificial garden has also become his father's playground. There are a variety of animals and even two tigers for hunting. His father's Taiwanese friend Lin Yuan also joins the group and becomes one of the Aboriginal virgins. Artificial rainforest garden, artificial indigenous tribes and girls, as well as artificial plants and animals, all these things symbolise nature, but there has been a violation of natural law precisely. Such rainforest is very personal, closed, artificial and contemporary, it is built on the basis of imagination. Thus, Chang Kuei-shing can write "his" mythical rainforest wildly in his imaginary world.

The transform of Li Yongping is more visible than Chang Kuei-hsin, but their transformation is different. If you think that the rainforest in Chang Kuei-hsin's fiction is inward and closed, then the rainforest described by Li Yong Ping is expanding and outward. The imaginary boundaries of Li Yongping's rainforest novels, from "Yuxue Feifei" to "Dahe Jintou" and then to "Zhu Ling Shu", have reached the point of "do as one pleases", i.e. from Li Yongping's hometown, Kuching to rainforest on the island of Borneo, to rowing on the river, and walking at the Kabuyasi riverside(卡布雅思河畔). It is completely not his familiar territory. Other than that, there is no temporal and spatial existence in the novel "Zhu Ling Shu". Zhu Ling can do whatever she wants, e.g. she can just turn into adult if she wants to and she can freeze herself if she feels like. No airplane is needed when she wants to go to the rainforest of the island of Borneo from Taipei, the writer can let her travel in the blink of an eye. Ignoring the language barrier, she who does not know Malay language can understand aboriginal girl's lengthy stories and they become very good friends. Breaking the boundary of yin and yang, dead Mr. Au Xi appears as a living corporeal and continues to collect the bodies of virgins on the river, and has a battle with Zhu Ling. Zhu Ling, as the protagonist, can also meet historical figures, James Brookel. Together with James Brooke, she witnesses the historical moment. This novel is just like the Nanyang version of "Jiangjun Bei" (將軍碑) by Zhang Da Chun (張大春).

Li Yongping completely discards the "real" element in his narration, perhaps this cannot solely be attributed to deliberately attempt to create a fantasy, ("write and write, unconsciously, I broke

into Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki's animation world"²²), I had no choice but to continue. We can find out a little clue from the prologue in Li Yongping's novel "Dahe Jintou- Xiajuan":

The remembrance of the river - this book - started when I just came to teach at a new university in eastern Taiwan and lived in a brand new hostel. One night, I woke up at midnight, sitting under a bright lamp on this huge and desolate campus in the valley, a mood of melancholy descended me, and I started to think of the past. All dogs howling here and there at the moon, an idea suddenly came to my mind, I took a few paper and a pen quickly, calling your name in my heart, calling your spirit solemnly by looking at the quiet, stood-still Amis holy mountain, the black Qilai mountain with a crescent moon, outside the window: Zhu Ling, come back! Please listen to me again, to what happened in Nanyang when I was young.²³

The experience he gained is the experience in Taiwan. The Badu Diban holy mountain (峇都帝坂聖山) on the island of Borneo in the novel is in fact the holy Amis Mountain in Taiwan. The writer imagines another mountain at the view of the mountain, hence the binary opposition of "Taipei" and "the island of Borneo" has already been loosed and the mountains become interchangeable. When he encounters bottleneck, the image of Taiwan appears again:

Later, I bought a house halfway up the mountain in Tamsui, Taipei County by a most wonderful chance - A Nanyang old wanderer, bought a property for the first time in his life! I couldn't sleep the night when we moved in, sitting alone by the window, staring at the foggy Mount Guanyin that lies across the river like a black mountain ghost, I lost in a daze. Suddenly the fog dissipated, a beam of light burst outside the window. So, I started to write again the first night I moved to Tamsui, our remembrance of the river began again - but this time it is official and no turning back - we set sail.²⁴

This is a perfect writing of regional experience. Due to the memory of the island of Borneo becomes lesser and lesser and personal feeling becomes weaker, the writer has to transform the rainforest on the island of Borneo by any means, be it the point of view, or be it the escape from reality by recalling. The writer tries to comfort himself through the past, and even produce a lot of fictional imaginable scenes that accompanied by history, reincarnation and so on.

²² Li Yongping: "Zixu/xiang Isao Takahata yu Hayao Miyazaki zhijing, Zhu Ling Shu", Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co., 2015, page 15. (自序/向高畑勲與宮崎駿致敬, 《朱翎書》)

²³ Li Yongping: "Xiajuan Yu/Wen Zhu Ling: Yuan shi Hewu?, Dahe Jintou-Xiajuan", Taipei, Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co., 2010, page 16. (下卷序/問朱翎: 緣是何物?, 《大河盡頭》(下卷))

²⁴ Li Yongping: "Xiajuan Yu/Wen Zhu Ling: Yuan shi Hewu?, Dahe Jintou-Xiajuan", Taipei, Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co., 2010, page 18.

All these attempts are done for the sake of his rainforest on the island of Borneo - and the possibility to wander around and to continue to write. By this way, Li Yongping "reproduces" the island of Borneo, "reproduce" is not original, but to reform: "The author went off to backstage and let his heroine with her own senses and mind, experiences and acknowledges the new, strange, beautiful and extremely frightening world. Zhu Ling has an independent and a true 'voyage of discovery' on the island of Borneo instead of a guided sightseeing tour."²⁵ In other words, "guided sightseeing tour" is fixed and it is provided and planned according to someone else's experiences and feeling. When he gives up the experience and joins the "journey of discovery", the rainforest on the island of Borneo is no longer being recognized passively via his personal interpretation, but actively influences and involves in his writing and forms a type of dialogue. Looking back at the claim made by Tian Si towards Sarawakian Chinese authors -- unreal, though it is one-sided, but in this case it certainly coincides.

Another problem is, when the rainforest on the island of Borneo no longer exists in the real geographic space and in the real experience of others, but in the imagination of the writers, does it mean that any corners of the world can be the imaginary setting of the writers? If so, why do Sarawakian Chinese authors in Taiwan still choose to write the island of Borneo? This leads us to the dialectical relationship between the locality (鄉土) and Yuan Hsiang (原鄉).

"Yuan Hsiang" literally means 'the original hometown' (原來的家鄉). In contrast to house you are living now, 'the original' implies not only the differences between past and present and the spatial changes, but also the longing imagination of the lost hometown from present time and space. On the other hand, the term "locality" emphasizes on the real regional experience of a person, it is more realistic. Thus, Yuan Hsiang is a concept that can be manufactured and it is imaginable, it has the characteristics of the devotion to the hometown. "Yuan Hsiang" is beyond the real geographical location; it also represents the beginning of longing for the meaning of life or the so-called "emotionally attached to" (情結). When someone speaks of Yuan Hsiang, it also means that the person has left the original hometown; there is a spatial distance. However, it must be pointed out that, "emotionally attached to Yuan Hsiang" is not necessarily opposite to "emotionally attached to locality"; it may not necessarily conflict with the locality consciousness.

Local writers insist on local experience, while those in Taiwan convey the imagination of hometown. This, on a metaphoric level, indicates Sarawak Chinese literature is growing along with imagination – the misplaced "island of Borneo". Professor David Wang has pointed out that, the crux of Li Yongping's long and longer story is that, his hometown imagination had surpassed a simple local literary structure; his stories need a setting which is larger than Kuching (古晉), Ji Ling (吉陵), and Haidong (海東).²⁶ Local writers and Taiwan-based writers represent two

²⁵Li Yongping: "Zixu/xiang Isao Takahata yu Hayao Miyazaki zhijing, Zhu Ling Shu", Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co., 2015, page 14.

²⁶David Der-wei Wang: "Xulun/Dahe de Jintou, jiushi yuantou, Dahe Jintou-Shangjuan", Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co., 2008, page 8. (序論/大河的盡頭，就是源頭，《大河盡頭》(上卷))

circumstances in the writing of the island of Borneo. The local writers, who were born and raised here, are full of emotion towards their motherland, they record their feelings by their eyes. Conversely, those in Taiwan have less personal experience, even if they had, majority of them are old memories, because of this, their setting is said to be an imagination, or conveys symbolic meanings: the mysterious rainforest, abyss of desire. In such case, Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan becomes outrageous, unreasonable, and borderless and thus the local authors think they are outrageous fabrication or distortion. However, the choice of Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese writers Li Yongping and Chang Kuei-hsin to write the island of Borneo also reflects parts of their localisation or consciousness.

When the Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese writers want to write a fantasy beyond reality, the island of Borneo becomes their Utopia in their memory: "I walked into the rainforest, as in the baby was back to the mother's womb, sucking earnestly, and no more worries,"²⁷ "Rainforest is large-hearted, the unpleasantness and depression in real life were diluted by rainforest without leaving any trace."²⁸ About utopia, Foucault (傅柯) said: "They are the places which have a direct or reverse relationship with the real society. They either represent the real society in a perfect way or they reverse the society, but in any case a fictional place is not a real space".²⁹ Utopia as an imaginary place, in fact, reflects that "my absence" and "self-reconstruction". The imagination of the rainforest on the island of Borneo is a virtual space that Sarawak Chinese authors who are permanent residents in Taiwan cannot enter.

²⁷Chang Kuei-hsin: "Zixu/Chongfan Yulin, Hou bei", Taipei: United Publishing, 2000, page 11. (自序/重返雨林, 《猴杯》)

²⁸Chang Kuei-hsin: "Zixu/Chongfan Yulin, Hou bei", Taipei: United Publishing, 2000, page 11.

²⁹ Foucault, M.: "Butong Kongjian de Shangwen yu Xiawen, translated by Wang Zhi Hong with reference to Kongjian de Wenhuxingshi yu Shehuililun Duben edited and translated by Xia Zhu Jiu, Wang Zhi Hong" Taipei: Mingwen Shuju, 1999, page 403 (〈不同空間的上文與下文〉, 王志宏譯, 參見夏鑄九、王志宏編譯: 《空間的文化形式與社會理論讀本》)

5. Conclusion

As mentioned above, the concept of "Sinophone literature" carries the meaning of denationalise-consciousness, the main concern here is not a common place of origin but a complex development. For example, Malaysia and Sarawak share a common national structure, however, because of their very different geographic location and cultural, they are in fact beyond the "same" affiliation. Although Sarawak Chinese literature can refuse to be labelled as Malaysia Chinese literature along with other literature in West Malaysia but it is not opposed to Mahua literature rigidly, but to highlight the geographic features of Sarawak Chinese literature such as the rainforest in Sarawak, as well as the interaction between multi-ethnic and their cultural societies. From this perspective, we can further consider the differences between local Sarawak Chinese literature and Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan when it comes to the description of regional characteristics of the island of Borneo. Next, the paper also discusses the inspiration of anti-diasporic that retrieved from the concept "Sinophone literature", stressing that there will be an end to diaspora; everyone has the chance to become a local. Thus, as a local and foreigner at the same time, the Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese authors Chang Kuei-hsin and Li Yongping also have the chance to farewell to diaspora. When we look at the context of their works, their "Borneo diaspora" should have come to an end, "Taiwanese-ness" (台灣在地性) will be increasingly implemented in their works, no matter they are aware or not. At the same time, we cannot measure the Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan by "Sarawakianness" (砂拉越在地性). As Shu-mei Shih has already reminded us in "Sinophone literature", the criterion for Chinese diaspora is "Chineseness", it has become something that can be judged, measured and quantified. Based on the arguments above, no matter the Sarawakianness in Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan is declining or disappearing, there are no reasons to be nostalgic or sentimental. The greatest significance of this paper that based on the concept of 'Sinophone literature' perhaps is that, geography is fixed, but the regional experience is mobile; by certain interaction, we can produce a wide variety of literary style.